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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: SERIOUS POLITICIAN ZOYIROV CHARGES RAHMONOV
"ILLEGITIMATE" AND TWO NEW PARTIES "ARTIFICIAL"

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, EXEC, Embassy
Dushanbe.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan Chairman Zoyirov continues to be a voice in the Tajik political wilderness logically and intelligently demanding that the Government of Tajikistan conform to the laws in its constitution - at least in part because he was one of the key drafters of the constitution which he based in large part on the U.S. model. He asked that the West speak out more forcefully for democracy in Tajikistan. Although he seems to be clean and honestly democratic, his constituency is miniscule (less than 2 percent of the electorate) and is limited mainly to the upper levels of the urban intelligentsia. Nevertheless, Zoyirov is worth listening to and cultivating. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Social-Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT) Chairman Rahmatullo Zoyirov called on the Ambassador November 17, accompanied by independent journalist Marat Mamadshoyev. Zoyirov asked the Ambassador to make a public statement to support Zoyirov's recent press release declaring President Rahmonov illegitimate by constitutional standards. (NOTE: Zoyirov was one of the original drafters of Tajikistan's constitution and served as the President's legal adviser until he resigned to protest the June 2003 referendum that gave Rahmonov the possibility of two more seven-year terms that could keep him in office until 2020. END NOTE.)

3. (C) The Ambassador explained that a diplomat cannot be partisan in internal political affairs, but affirmed he would continue to emphasize in public the importance of democratic process. Zoyirov well understood this, and simply deployed his request as an opening gambit for a more serious discussion of democracy, or lack thereof, in Tajikistan.

CONTINUE TO SPEAK OUT FOR DEMOCRACY

4. (C) Zoyirov charged that the U.S. Embassy has gone silent on democracy issues since mid-2004. The Ambassador refuted this and said we would send Zoyirov every press statement and transcript on democracy since June 2004.

5. (C) The Ambassador acknowledged that the Tajik Government has indeed gone backward on democracy and that the U.S. Embassy has well documented it for Washington. He explained in detail that, since mid-2004, the Tajik Government has faced steadily increasing pressure from Moscow, as a result of the "color revolutions," to limit the influence and even presence of the United States and the European Union in Tajikistan. Related to this, the government has step by step cracked down on anything and anyone construed to be an agent of influence for change, including independent political parties and opposition mass media and even the international Rotary Club. Zoyirov fully concurred.

PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS MADE BY EMOTION

6. (C) The Ambassador noted that his explanation of pressure from Moscow is not meant to exonerate Rahmonov, who is responsible for his own actions. Zoyirov explained, from his own experience in the Presidential Apparatus, that Rahmonov, somewhat like Uzbekistan's Karimov, is emotional rather than analytical and intellectual. When he was in the Apparatus, Zoyirov said that he and his staff would spend six weeks carefully drafting to meet international standards and then

broadly clearing presidential decrees to improve governance. But Rahmonov as likely as not, to the staff's great astonishment and chagrin, rejected them just before he was to sign them, based on whichever special interest had most recently had his ear.

TWO NEW PARTIES "ARTIFICIAL"

7. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Zoyirov thought that the two newly registered political parties - the Agrarian Party of Tajikistan (APT) and the Party of Economic Reforms (PER) are legitimate and independent or government-created pocket parties. He noted the notoriously legalistic Ministry of Justice had

registered them on their first tries. Zoyirov responded that of course the parties are illegitimate government tools, if for no other reason than their chairmen are academic rectors who are government-approved civil servants. (NOTE: Zoyirov released a press statement on November 18 describing the APT and PER as "artificial." END NOTE.) He explained these parties will be allowed to give "soft criticism" of the government to give the illusion of open political debate for Western consumption.

OBAIDULLOYEV PANTING BUT TOLD TO BACK OFF

18. (C) The Ambassador asked if Chairman of Parliament and Mayor of Dushanbe Mahmdsaid Obaidulloyev will emerge as a serious presidential contender for the late 2006 presidential election. (NOTE: Obaidulloyev - his mafia nickname is "Bini," "the nose" - has long been fuming because he thought he had a gentleman's agreement with Rahmonov that 2006 would be his "turn" to be president before the 2003 referendum overturned his expectations. END NOTE.) Zoyirov said that Tajiks, especially Kulyobis, would probably view Obaidulloyev as a legitimate contender, and that he indeed has a powerful desire to be president, if only to better pay off his own cronies. However, Moscow has made clear to both Rahmonov and Obaidulloyev they are "on the same team" - i.e., pro-Moscow - and cannot be allowed to tear each other down.

DEMOCRACY SMALL GRANT STYMIED

19. (C) Journalist Mahmadsboyev asked if his U.S. Embassy Democracy Small Grant to create an independent newspaper, "Imruz" ("Today"), could be extended beyond its November 30 expiration. He has been unable to register "Imruz" with the Ministry of Justice, he's been explicitly told, because "Imruz" has U.S. funding. (COMMENT: The original grant was for a "consortium of journalists to create an independent newspaper." In fact, Mahmadsboyev has now allied himself with Zoyirov's SDPT, and "Imruz" would likely become a party voice. END COMMENT.) The Ambassador agreed to extend the grant, and suggested Mahmadsboyev explore an independent web site for his project, or other creative means, not yet subject to the knuckle-draggers, of working around the Ministry of Justice legalisms.

110. (C) COMMENT: Tajikistan is one year away from presidential elections, which it is universally assumed President Rahmonov will win. Even without the daily "guidance" from Moscow, he likely would maneuver to ensure that he has no legitimate competition. We are impressed that Zoyirov appears to be the only politician in Tajikistan willing to take public stances against Rahmonov and his regime. He may calculate, because he was not corrupt during his government service, unlike the imprisoned Democratic Party of Tajikistan Chairman Mahmadrusi Iskandarov, that he can risk confronting the regime because the West would come to his defense. That said, even though he seems to be clean and honestly democratic, his constituency is

miniscule, likely no more than two percent of the electorate, and is limited mainly to the upper levels of the urban intelligentsia who have had some degree of exposure to the West. Would he be a good president for Tajikistan? Probably yes. But he does not have a glimmer of hope of winning a free election in the current stage of Tajikistan's political development. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND

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